

CLAIMS:

1. An apparatus for dispensing an item having a body portion and an opening allowing access to the interior of the body portion, the apparatus comprising a chamber having a mouth, the mouth being shaped and dimensioned to receive the opening of the item, the opening of at least one item being fitted to the mouth, in use, so as to provide a substantially fluid-tight seal at the mouth and such that at least part of the, or each, body portion is located inside the chamber; the apparatus further comprising means for causing a pressure differential between the interior surface and exterior surface of said at least one item.
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2. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said chamber comprises an opening, said pressure differential causing means comprises means for evacuating gas from said chamber through said chamber opening.
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3. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 2, wherein said evacuating means comprises a gas extraction means such as a pump or fan.
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4. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 2, wherein said evacuating means comprised means for expelling gas from the chamber.
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5. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, wherein said chamber opening is fitted with a valve, the valve being operable in at least a first mode in which it permits gas to be expelled from the chamber through the chamber opening and substantially prevents gas from being drawn into the chamber through the chamber opening.
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6. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 5, wherein the valve is operable in a second mode in which gas is permitted to enter the chamber through said chamber opening.
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7. An apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 4 to 6, wherein at least a portion of the chamber is reversibly compressible, the volume defined by the chamber depending on the state of compression of said at least a portion of the chamber.
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8. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 7, wherein said at least a portion of the chamber comprises at least one fluted portion that is foldable in a concertina-like manner.
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9. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 8, wherein the chamber comprises a body having a plurality of substantially parallel flutes, the body being foldable in a concertina-like manner.
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10. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the apparatus further includes a removable lid for the mouth of the chamber, the lid, when fitted over the mouth, forming a substantially fluid tight seal around the mouth and said at least one item to create a first and a second sealed section in the apparatus, said first and second sections being partitioned by said at least one item, and wherein each of said first and second sections are maintained, before the lid is removed, in a state of partial vacuum.
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11. An apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim, wherein a collar is provided around the chamber mouth, the collar being arranged to receive the opening of said at least one item.
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12. An apparatus as claimed in Claim 11, wherein the collar projects from the mouth in a direction generally perpendicular with the plane in which the mouth lies.
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13. A dispensing system comprising an apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 12, the system further including said at least one item fitted to the chamber mouth.

5 14. A dispensing system as claimed in Claim 13, wherein said at least one item comprises at least one glove, preferably formed at least partially from flexible material, and more preferably from resilient elastic material.

10 15. A method of dispensing an item having a body portion and an opening allowing access to the interior of the body portion, the method comprising fitting the opening of at least one item to the mouth of a chamber so as to provide a substantially fluid-tight seal at the mouth and such that at least part of the, or each, body portion is located inside the chamber; and causing a pressure differential between the interior surface and exterior surface of said at 15 least one item.

16. A method as claimed in Claim 15, wherein said chamber comprises an opening, the method further including evacuating gas from said chamber through said chamber opening.

20 17. A method as claimed in Claim 17, wherein said chamber comprises an opening and at least a portion of the chamber is reversibly compressible, the method comprising expelling air from said chamber by compressing said at least a portion of the chamber; and uncompressing said least a portion of the chamber.
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